

VZCZCXRO1245  
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV  
DE RUEHLB #1818/01 3241442  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 201442Z NOV 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0216  
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY 0889  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1702  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1896  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001818

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/GAVITO/YERGER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: AOUN PREDICTS VIOLENCE IF NO PRESIDENT IS  
ELECTED

BEIRUT 00001818 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Despite persistent rumors that he has made a deal over an abbreviated presidential term for Michel Edde, Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun continues to reject any candidate on the Patriarch's list of seven other than himself. His only fall-back is an interim cabinet (which we presume he expects to lead) to prepare the way for changing the electoral law and then holding legislative elections. Aoun refuses to play a constructive role in finding a solution to the presidency, instead hinting at violence after President Lahoud's term expires, though he denied the FPM would be involved. French Foreign Minister Kouchner, speaking with the Ambassador, expressed frustration with Aoun's intransigence. End summary.

MORE SOUR GRAPES

2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief, met with Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun and his advisor and son-in-law Gebran Bassil on November 20. Much of the meeting was a rehashing of Aoun's complaints that the FPM has been deprived its due representation in parliament and the cabinet, and that Aoun, with the support of most of Lebanon's Christians and the head of a major parliamentary bloc, is the only candidate who has the legitimacy to become presidency. Instead, he had been "evicted" and "punished" because of his 2006 MOU with Hizballah, even though, he claimed, unspecified others were providing Hizballah with better, written offers on its arms. The Ambassador noted that the nearly two-year old MOU had not accomplished much, to which Aoun retorted that it was the fault of the Siniora government and the summer 2006 "accident."

AOUN REJECTS PATRIARCH'S LIST OF CANDIDATES

3. (C) The Ambassador, stressing U.S. support for the French initiative, asked Aoun where he thought it was heading. Aoun, complaining that he was not informed about the

initiative beforehand or consulted by the French, expressed disappointment with the Patriarch's list of seven candidates, reiterating that he did not want to be on the list. Michel Edde was full of empty promises, Nassib Lahoud had been a member of a Palestinian militia, Robert Ghanem was a "nice guy, from an honest family," but Lebanon needed leaders with popular support, not honesty, and one who could restore the role of the Christians in Lebanon. Riad Salameh was "young and dynamic" but needed a constitutional amendment. In short, he said, the French initiative was outside of Lebanon's "democratic tradition" and outside of the constitution. The Ambassador responded that, according to the constitution, parliament should elect a president.

#### PRESIDENTIAL VACUUM WILL LEAD TO CONFLICT

-----

¶4. (C) Aoun described what he saw as four possible scenarios. The first two were either: 1) a consensus president is reached; or 2) an interim government is formed, which would provide "an honorable exit for everyone." Two other unacceptable scenarios were either: 1) PM Siniora stays on and his government assumes presidential powers; or 2) March 14 elects a president with a half plus one vote. Both of these, Aoun claimed, would be unconstitutional (the first scenario because the Siniora government itself is illegitimate following the November 11, 2006 of its Shia membership).

¶5. (C) Asked what will happen on midnight November 23, when President Lahoud's mandate ends, Aoun predicted Lahoud would leave office, with no replacement, PM Siniora will remain, and political and physical conflict will ensue. The Ambassador, noting that Siniora would resign once a new president is elected, responded that there was no reason for violence, and certainly March 14 would not start it; in whose interest would it be? Aoun, dodging the question, said there

BEIRUT 00001818 002.2 OF 002

might not be violence immediately, but "certainly we'll have problems" due to an atmosphere of "instability and anxiousness." The FPM would not take any action, he claimed, but nor would it renounce its political position.

¶6. (C) Bassil interjected that the way to avoid conflict was through an interim government, based on the same representation as parliament. The Ambassador, stating that this would be tantamount to throwing away the last thread of legitimacy of Lebanon's democratic institutions, said a better solution was to elect a president before November 24. The world will be watching to see who doesn't show up to vote, he warned.

#### COMMENT

-----

¶7. (S) Soon after the meeting with Aoun on November 20, the Ambassador also spoke by phone with French Foreign Minister Kouchner, who believes that Aoun, through unrelenting intransigence, has now proven himself "irrelevant" to a solution. Kouchner was very pessimistic, viewing March 8's actions as proof that Syria does not want a solution, though Kouchner himself had no back-up plan.

¶8. (C) Aoun's extreme dislike of PM Siniora (whom he believes supports "tawteen" or nationalization of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to increase Lebanon's Muslim population at the expense of the Christians) was evident in the meeting. He even claimed to have sent a letter to UN SYG Ban Ki-Moon protesting the international community's excessive support to Siniora, which would lead to "tawteen."  
FELTMAN